

Harvest the Energy

Dear Diary ...

Track healthful habits with a food and fitness diary

Keeping a food and fitness diary is an organized way to learn about your daily eating habits and compare them with a scientifically proven, healthful eating plan — the Food Guide Pyramid. A diary also is a helpful way to track your daily exercise and compare it to the activity levels recommended by the Surgeon General to improve the health of Americans. Following are quick-and-easy steps for creating a food and fitness diary, as well as helpful hints for making it a successful tool.

How to create a food and fitness diary

- List each day of the week down the left-hand side of an 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper. Across the top of the page, make seven columns and label with the following food groups: grains, vegetables, fruit, meat/protein, and dairy. In the next column put fats, oils, and sweets, and in the final column, daily exercise.
- For each serving of food you eat throughout the day, place a checkmark in the box of the corresponding food group. For each 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, place a checkmark in the exercise box of the corresponding day.
- At the end of each day, compare the number of servings you ate to the number of servings recommended each day by the Food Guide Pyramid. The groups and recommended number of servings include:

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| ◆ Bread, cereal, rice, and pasta | 6-11 servings |
| ◆ Vegetables | 3-5 servings |
| ◆ Fruit | 2-4 servings |
| ◆ Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts | 2-3 servings |
| ◆ Milk, yogurt, and cheese | 2-3 servings |
| ◆ Fats, oils, and sweets | use sparingly |
- The Surgeon General recommends adults should devote 30 minutes or more to moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. Examples of moderate-intensity physical activity include: a 30-minute brisk walk, 30 minutes of lawn mowing or raking leaves, a 5-minute run, or 45 minutes of playing volleyball.

Helpful hints for a successful food and fitness diary

- Be realistic and be honest. There is nothing to be gained by trying to look good on paper. You can only improve your lifestyle habits if you record and see what you are really eating and doing physically.
- Keep accurate records. Record what you eat and how much you exercise on all days — not just days you feel like being healthy.
- Analyze what you eat. At the end of each day, take a look at what you ate. If you find the number of servings you consumed is different from the number of servings recommended by the Food Guide Pyramid, consider what adjustments you can make for the next day.
- Record your eating and exercise as you go. Do not depend on your memory at the end of the day.
- Remember small steps are better and more sustainable than giant leaps. Increase your exercise slowly and try to develop one new healthy habit a month.

Once you have mastered the diary, assess your daily eating habits online at USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion at <http://147.208.9.133/>. After entering a day's worth of dietary information on the site, you will receive a "score" on the overall quality of your diet for that day. Don't worry if you are not perfect, no one is. You can gradually improve.

